

COMMENTS ON RACISM*

I have some comments to make on a difficult subject. They are prompted by some incidents that have taken place in Townsville.

When you interview a client, you have to see the client as an individual person, not as one of a more or less uniform group. You will have noticed, for instance, in relation to will drafting, that I have made a point of showing that each client is different, and must be advised according to her or his needs as you discover them during discussion with the client. In particular, you cannot apply your prejudices to your client, especially if those prejudices are based on race or ethnic background or religion.

I want to say a little more about this. My excuse is that I come from what has been one of the most racist countries in the world.

Perhaps luckily, I know almost nothing about Australia's history. What I have to say now would no doubt be completely different if I did know some history.

The racist

A racist assumes that he or she can generalise about people by their race or religion or ethnic origins. He or she assumes that just by a person's appearance or language or accent you can know things about their character or habits or their attitude to work or money or cleanliness or morals. A racist does not have to make any effort to get to know people of the other race on an individual basis, because you know all you need to know about them just by looking at them or hearing them speak or knowing their religious affiliations.

A racist often assumes that he or she is intrinsically better or worth more than the members of the other race. A racist knows that he or she (and also the other members of his or her own group), is not immoral, or ruthlessly seeking money, or lazy and improvident, or a troublemaker or irrational like the members of the other race.

Effect on the racist

Being a racist affects the person who is one. It is obvious to all except the racist that the other race, like the racist's own race, contains a complete range of characters, of kind and ruthless, of generous and selfish, of good and wicked people, and that therefore the group cannot be categorised and set apart as if they were a homogeneous mass. And if anyone considers the facts for five minutes he or she will see that this is true. It follows that believing that you can tell things

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about a person just because of their appearance or language or religion, so that you don't need to get to know them individually in order to know what they will be like, or whether you can trust them, is false.

If a person wantonly continues to believe these things without being open to a change of heart, that person is persisting in an untruth. The racist is intrinsically a liar. It follows that the racist is morally *lower* than many people in the other, despised, race.

If you want to hold somebody down in the gutter, you have got to stay there yourself. Remember, a person who wants to keep another group down in the gutter must herself or himself be a gutter dweller.

Effect on the victim

If the victim has to live among a dominant group which is racist, the effects on the victim are various: sometimes hatred, sometimes a desire for revenge, sometimes hopeless misery, sadness and disillusionment. Victims of racism feel despised, distrusted, hated, isolated, lonely, lost. The racist who induces these feelings in another person is herself or himself cruel, unkind, heartless, uncompassionate and blind - as well as being a liar.

What is astounding is that an amazingly high proportion of victims are generous, forgiving, kindly members of the community that mistreats them. These people contribute vastly to the whole community, including the oppressor group, by their integrity, energy and love. This proves again that racists are liars.

But many victims of racism succumb to rage, revenge, despair, hopelessness and alcoholism. They wonder: What is the point of trying? They even come to believe the falsehoods that racists disseminate about them. These are terrible things. They destroy people, they destroy families, they destroy whole communities. Racism is pernicious because it is destructive.

The person who lets their prejudices show should consider the damage and pain they are causing. Remember that the victims of racism also bleed when they are pricked; they also weep when their child dies. They are people worthy of your care, your consideration and your respect. You lessen yourself if you do not give them your care, consideration and respect; if you decline to see them as individuals.

Effects on communities

Racial discrimination produces communities which seek liberation from oppressors, and it produces a desire for revenge. Racism produces lasting distrust. This can lead to the horrors of civil war - East Timor, Aceh, Sri Lanka, the Middle East, Africa, Serbia, Iraq, Turkey and more. The consequences can last for a thousand years. Look at the enduringly calamitous relationships between Christians and Muslims, which go back to the Crusades.

In South Africa racism used to be entrenched by legislation. That is one of the reasons why we left at the end of 1973. One manifestation of racist legislation in South Africa provided that black men from the rural areas were allowed to come

to the cities to work on the mines and do menial jobs. (The black men could not get promotion to senior jobs: the more senior jobs were reserved by legislation for white men.) The men were not allowed to bring their wives or families. They were allowed only to be celibate.

Of course there were lots of black women in the cities - including vast numbers of prostitutes. So huge numbers of children without families were born - they had no fathers, and hopeless mothers. There was no social security, so they lived by their wits or died. Nearly all became criminals.

In the late 1960s Government policy suddenly insisted that all instruction in schools must be in the students' home language. This was to keep black people in their place and prevent them from integrating into the white community, and to keep the racial groups separate. The school boycotts began, and the school riots - they wanted to continue to have instruction in English. The Government used force to quell the riots, and keep the children in the schools. Children were beaten and shot. The Defence Force used "Caspirs" to patrol the township streets. A "Caspir" is an armoured army vehicle with 6 huge wheels and guns. The children in the schools became so terrified that when they were in school having their lessons, and they heard a Caspir coming towards the school along the road, they defecated in their clothes in class.

Of course, with the boycotts and riots, a generation of children grew up in the 70s and 80s who had no education whatever. They lived by crime. They are now the parents of a new generation of lawless urban children. Five of these children murdered my nephew, aged 46, 4 weeks ago. They hijacked him from outside his home when he came back from work, and over a period of several hours showed him off to their friends at different venues. At some stage during the night they shot him in the knee with a 9mm pistol so he could not run away. Finally, in the early hours of the morning they took him into the country and shot him in the back of the neck. Four of the young men who did this have been arrested. What was the motive for his death? This is not clear, but it seems that the men wanted to get into a gang, and to prove themselves they had to kill somebody important.

What happened to my beloved nephew Grant is directly traceable back to racism. Racist thinking led to racist action and racist legislation which destroyed the morality of a community. That is what racism does. It destroys its own community.

That is all I want to say.

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